

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 098686

EXDIS TOSEC 267

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, MASS, CBMR

SUBJ: CRITICAL ASPECTS OF U. S. AIR OPERATIONS IN CAMBODIA

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SECSTATE, MAY 22, FROM PHNOM PENH,
RPTD TO YOU:

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 5003

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, MASS, CBMR

SUBJ: CRITICAL ASPECTS OF U. S. AIR OPERATIONS IN CAMBODIA

SECSTATE PLS PASS PRIORITY TO SECDEF, CINCPAC, COMUSSAG/7 AF,
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK, AMEMBASSY PARIS, AMEMBASSY SAIGON,
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

PARIS FOR KISSINGER

1. WHILE YOU ARE NO LESS AWARE THAN WE OF THE CRITICALITY
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OF U. S. MILITARY AIR OPERATIONS TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE GKR IN THE ABSENCE OF A CEASEFIRE, THERE ARE SEVERAL ASPECTS OF THAT CRITICALITY WHICH WE WISH TO ADDRESS IN THIS MESSAGE, HAVING IN MIND THAT OVER THE NEXT DAYS AND WEEKS IT MAY PROVE EXPEDIENT OR DESIRABLE TO DRAW DISTINCTIONS AMONG VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF OPERATIONS.

2. THAT TACAIR OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS HAS PROVIDED THE NECESSARY MARGIN FOR SURVIVAL NEEDS NO LENGTHY ELABORATION. WITHIN THE LAST THREE MONTHS, TO TAKE THE MOST RECENT EXAMPLES, KOMPONG THOM AND TAKEO WOULD HAVE FALLEN AND THE MEKONG WOULD HAVE BEEN CONCLUSIVELY INTERDICTED WITHOUT TACAIR. WE THINK IT POSSIBLE THAT THE PRESENT DAILY LEVEL OF T-28 SORTIES FLOWN BY KAF COULD BE DOUBLED TO SAY 30 WITH ASSETS ON HAND IF PILOT TRAINING WERE DRASTICALLY CURTAILED, BUT THE KAF HAS NEITHER THE FIREPOWER NOR THE PROFICIENCY TO COPE ALONE WITH THE TYPE OF EMERGENCY COMBAT SITUATION THE FANK HAS REPEATEDLY HAD TO FACE.

3. THE MEKONG CONVOY, VITAL TO THE SUPPLY OF THE PHNOM PENH AREA WITH PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, MUNITIONS, IMPORTED RICE, AND RAW MATERIALS FOR INDUSTRY, IS PARTICULARLY ILLUSTRATIVE OF FANK AND KAF INADEQUACIES. WITHOUT STRIPPING OTHER FRONTS, FANK IS PRESENTLY UNABLE TO PROVIDE THE FORCES NECESSARY FIRMLY TO SECURE BOTH BANKS OF THE MEKONG ALONG THEIR FULL LENGTH FROM PHNOM PENH TO THE SVN FRONTIER. FOR ITS PART, THE KAF NOW HAS 11 AU 24' S IN OPERATION AND WILL HAVE 6 HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS OPERATIONAL IN TWO WEEKS. THEY CAN PROVIDE SOME BUT INSUFFICIENT PROTECTION FOR THE CONVOYS AGAINST A VERY DETERMINED ENEMY. THIS INADEQUACY WOULD BE READILY APPARENT TO SHIP OWNERS, MASTERS, CREWS, AND KHMER PILOTS, AND IN OUR JUDGMENT, THEY MAY WELL REFUSE TO SAIL IF U. S. TACAIR IS WITHDRAWN. WITHOUT REGULAR MEKONG CONVOYS OR A VAST EMERGENCY AIRLIFT, PHNOM PENH WITH ITS POPULATION OF 1.3 MILLION WOULD NOT LONG REMAIN A VIABLE URBAN CENTER. IT WOULD SOON HAVE NO ELECTRICITY, NO INDUSTRY, AND RAPIDLY DWINDLING STOCKS OF SUCH NECESSITIES AS RICE (THERE IS A 38- DAY SUPPLY ON HAND AT THE MOMENT). UNEMPLOYMENT, HUNGER, AND CIVIL DISORDERS WOULD FOLLOW

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QUICKLY IN ABOUT THAT SEQUENCE. THE RAPID DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION IN PHNOM PENH WOULD IN FACT BE THE MOST SERIOUS IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCE OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF TACAIR SUPPORT.

4. U. S. MILIARY AIR TRANSPORT FILLS ALMOST AS VITAL A NEED AS TACAIR. RICE AND MUNITIONS ARE AIR- DROPPED

REGULARLY BY C-130'S TO THE ISOLATED AND REFUGEE- SWOLLEN
COMMUNITIES OF TAKEO (30,000 PERSONS), SVAY RIENG
(60,000), AND KOMPONG THOM (7,000). KAF C-47'S CAN
LAND AT THE LATTER TWO TOWNS, BUT THE TRANSPORT FLEET
IS INADEQUATE TO MEET THESE AS WELL AS THE MANY OTHER
PRESSING IN- COUNTRY REQUIREMENTS. (THE 5 C-123'S
THUS FAR DELIVERED WILL NOT BECOME OPERATIONAL UNTIL
MID- AUGUST WHEN THE FIRST EIGHT CREWS BECOME AVAILABLE.)
C-130'S ALSO DELIVER HIGH VALUE MUNITIONS AND OTHER MAP
EQUIPMENT AND MATERIAL TO POCHENTONG, SUPPLEMENTING
MEKONG CONVOY AND HIGHWAY FOUR DELIVERIES OF THESE
ITEMS. IN THE PERIOD JANUARY- APRIL 1973 THERE WERE
AN AVERAGE OF 175 C-130 AIRLANDED SORTIES AND 65.5
C-130 AIR- DROP SORTIES MONTHLY IN CAMBODIA.

5. YOU WILL NOTE THAT QUITE APART FROM THE MILITARY BENEFITS THE
GKR DERIVES FROM OUR AIR OPERATIONS THE LATTER ARE EQUALLY
CRITICAL TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE POPULATION IN THE CAPITAL AREA
AND IN THE LOCALITIES CITED IN PARA 4. OUR AIR SUPPORT THUS
SERVES A SIGNIFICANT HUMANITARIAN PURPOSE INDEPENDENT
OF ITS OTHER USES; ITS WITHDRAWAL WOULD ENTAIL FURTHER
AND EVEN MORE WIDESPREAD SUFFERING.

6. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON THE GKR OF A TOTAL WITH-
DRAWAL OF OUR AIR SUPPORT WOULD BE IMMEDIATE AND D
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